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LESSONS LEARED – Saturday, January 3, 2026 – C&C NEWS

Military Action in Venezuela

The year 2026 began with a significant military operation resulting in the capture of Venezuela's president, Nicolás Maduro, and his wife. Executed by the U.S. military during the early hours of a holiday week, the mission achieved complete surprise. Reports indicate that U.S. forces disabled Venezuelan air defense systems, allowing Apache and Chinook helicopters to operate over Caracas with minimal resistance.

While the operation involved military assets, the administration has framed it as a law enforcement action. The military served in a protective capacity for Department of Justice (DOJ) personnel who were executing a long-standing arrest warrant related to narco-terrorism and cocaine trafficking. President Trump cited the 1989 arrest of Manuel Noriega in Panama as a legal and historical precedent for using military force to apprehend a foreign leader indicted on drug charges. Observers noted the high level of operational discipline, as the massive logistical undertaking was completed without public leaks.

New York City's Shift in Governance

In New York City, Zohran Mamdani has been sworn in as the youngest mayor in a century, beginning his term with a focus on collectivist ideology. Despite his campaign rhetoric, his initial executive orders regarding the city's housing crisis have utilized surprisingly conservative, supply-side economic strategies.

Mayor Mamdani's primary initiatives include:

- **The LIFT Task Force (Land Inventory Fast Track): This program aims to privatize city-owned land, turning it over to private developers to accelerate housing construction and lower costs through increased supply.**
- **The SPEED Task Force (Streamlining Procedures to Expedite Equitable Development): This initiative focuses on deregulation by identifying and removing bureaucratic and permitting barriers that increase construction costs.**

These orders suggest an attempt to address affordability through market principles—increasing supply and decreasing regulatory "green tape"—rather than through the rent freezes he proposed during his campaign.

Real Estate Market Trends

A significant correction is currently underway in the U.S. housing market. The Wall Street Journal recently reported that condominium prices have experienced their largest annual decline since 2012. While media outlets often frame falling prices as a negative economic indicator, these shifts are beginning to address the long-standing housing affordability crisis, particularly for younger voters.

Economists suggest the market is entering a "preference cascade," where sellers who previously held out for higher prices are now forced to accept losses as market conditions shift. This trend is exacerbated by stricter immigration enforcement, which has reduced the number of subsidized renters and pressured property owners to sell unwanted assets.

The National Daycare Fraud Crisis

A major investigation into federal childcare subsidies has uncovered systemic fraud, leading the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to freeze payments to all states. In Minnesota, investigators

estimate that at least 50% of the state's daycare funding—amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars—is fraudulent.

The fraud typically involves "ghost" daycare centers that bill for children who do not attend or create "no-show" jobs for parents to justify subsidies. Several factors have made this system easy to exploit:

- **Lack of Oversight: State laws often require only one unannounced inspection per year, and some officials may be providing advance notice to scammers.**
- **Inadequate Documentation: Providers are not required to maintain electronic databases, and current prosecution relies on handwritten sign-in sheets that are often incomplete or falsified.**
- **Legal Loopholes: Changes to billing forms have removed essential certifications, making it difficult for prosecutors to prove a specific intent to defraud rather than mere "bad bookkeeping".**

Proposed Reforms for Welfare Integrity

The scale of the current fraud suggests that case-by-case prosecution is insufficient. To restore integrity to the system, several structural changes have been proposed:

- **Increased Penalties: To deter fraud when the risk of being caught is low, the financial and legal costs of a conviction must be significantly higher.**
- **Stricter Accountability: Every required report should be signed under penalty of perjury, and providers should face immediate penalties if they fail to maintain proper records.**
- **Eligibility Restrictions: Immigrants should be ineligible for public assistance for a minimum of ten years after entering the country to ensure they do not participate in "honor system" programs before fully integrating.**

- **Privatization of Aid: The government should consider exiting the welfare business entirely, instead providing funds to established community organizations and churches that can better monitor local needs and prevent abuse.**

The current expansion of this scandal indicates that the existing system is unsustainable and that significant legislative changes are likely forthcoming.

To understand the systemic failure of the current subsidy program, imagine a community garden where the gates are left unlocked and the harvest is distributed based on an unverified sign-up sheet. Without a guard or a camera to verify who is actually working the land, a few individuals will inevitably claim the entire harvest for themselves, leaving nothing for those who truly need it.